

## The Clipper visits....Friend Weiler, resource officer

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Keeping kids safe has never been easy, but today's technology has opened doors that make the definition of "safe" that much harder to gauge. School resource officer Friend Weiler started his career working with the Duxbury schools 15 years ago. In that time, he's seen how technology has changed how children interact with each other. Back then, cell phones were not common in the student population; they were only in the hands of about a third of Americans. Now interactions between students take place electronically and often without use of real names, which can lead to trouble. "There are ways to be anonymous and still communicate with a lot of people now and there's quite a few platforms to do it – new ones crop up all the time," said Weiler in a recent interview at his office in the Duxbury High School/Middle School. "We go through many training sessions each year to keep up, but as soon as you are finished learning about one technology application, two more are out there. "It is getting harder and harder to keep up with technology to understand what the kids are involved in, as well as how someone may try to communicate with them for the wrong reasons," said Weiler. But there are some aspects of electronics that help police officers. For example, an accusation of bullying online or in a cell phone text is easier to prove than just saying someone is bullying another. "Once a screen shot is produced of exactly what was said, "there's clear evidence, in black and white," Weiler said.



Resource officer Friend Weiler

### How the school addresses 'sexting'

Three years ago, a 'sexting' scandal hit Duxbury and although the people involved were minors, the problem – taking inappropriate or partially naked pictures of their peers and sharing them with each other – hit the media and the TV news within a few days after the school administration and the police department had figured out the issue. "Because we are talking about kids, you really don't want a problem like this to hit the public eye," said Weiler. "But this is the world we live in. We address it and discuss in health class so kids know not to do that in the future – once pictures are out there, you can't really get them back. You just hope you get through (to the kids). Some of these things make it to court, some don't. You have to try and stop it before it starts through education."

Ninth graders learn about sexting and other sex education from a legal perspective in health class; Weiler teaches a section called "Sex and the law." He explained: "We are educating kids about what the age of consent is, what child pornography is, what assault and battery is. We talk about how drugs and alcohol can lead you down the wrong path and make you susceptible to physical violence and sexual assaults and all kinds of high-risk behaviors."

Weiler, a Duxbury native, father of three and the longstanding, award-winning coach for high school girls' varsity hockey team, wears a lot of hats within the community. Besides his roles as school resource officer and coach, he interacts with students in all the school – particularly in the health class curriculum from fifth grade on when the subject matter goes into peer pressure, bullying and drug avoidance, etc. "I'm here to help these kids," he said. "They may not always see it that way. But that's why I'm here. That's why I got into this in the first place."

### **Underage parties, “in the presence of,” and the law**

Like all adolescent populations, Duxbury has problems with underage drinking and drug use, parties at houses when parents are away, etc. Many parents and students have been upset by “in the presence of” accusations and punishment for primarily high school students who are caught at a party – not necessarily drinking or being under the influence of anything other than a social desire to be with their friends. Any juvenile in possession of drugs or alcohol or operating a vehicle under the influence of an illegal substance can be arrested, but “in the presence of” marks a gray area that the law doesn’t cover, said Weiler. It is an issue with the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, which governs Duxbury’s high school athletics. “The law doesn’t account for ‘being in the presence of,’ but the school has to take part in MIAA sports,” Weiler said. “It’s part of the athletic handbook kids have to sign to play.” “There will be consequences for a student athlete, but not from the law,” he said. “The consequences would come from the school, which has to uphold the MIAA regulations to compete.” Stories about sober kids who drove home friends who were under the influence and then were punished themselves are not accurate, said Weiler.

“If you are trying to help out a friend who was stuck at the wrong place at the wrong time and needs to get someplace safe, and you have not broken the law and they have not broken the law, that is to be commended,” he said. “A reasonable person wouldn’t look at that as ‘in the presence of.’”

The recent drug issues at the school were tied to a “prescription drug problem,” Weiler said. “And that’s all over the South Shore. We have an issue with drugs being prescribed in response to surgeries or medical procedures and then they can be accessed by other people in the house. This isn’t just a Duxbury problem, it’s an everywhere problem.” Increasingly, Weiler said that law enforcement is looking at drug addiction as a disease.

“It’s more about getting people to a hospital and getting them help,” he said.

### **Drug avoidance and antibullying**

Weiler’s work in the fifth grade health classes starts a program called “healthy choices.” It focuses on drug avoidance and good decision-making.

“There’s been a ton of research about the introduction of drugs and alcohol at younger ages. The younger kids start, the higher the likelihood of addiction,” he said. “We are trying to introduce drug avoidance behaviors and we talk about ways to handle peer pressure and ways to avoid being in a situation that you don’t want to be in.” Weiler said one of the best aspects of his job is that it never gets boring.

“One day, we have an Internet issue, another day is completely different. Today I met with Alden PTO, then I had a community-based juvenile justice meeting at the district attorney’s office, now I’m back at the high school,” he said. “Every day is different. And, I get a chance to help my community.”

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